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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses a study that attempted to explore the factors having an impact upon delinquents' behavior change in Korea. Specifically, it examined the risk factors and the protective factors related to delinquent behaviors in Korean youth. Participants (N=10) were interviewed about the history of their delinquent behavior; family background; school experience; peer relationships outside of school; the turning point and process of their behavior change; and factors perceived to have an impact upon their behavior change. Results found that nine out of ten youths had family risk factors. Failure in school was found to be another significant risk factor. With regard to protective factors, all interviewees regarded "self-determination to change" as the most important factor to prevent recidivism. Individual characteristics, such as intellectual capability to analyze the results of delinquent behaviors, were found to prevent recidivism. Experiences of success in school in the past was shown to help the youths to keep trust in their potential and protect them from conducting more serious problem behaviors. (Contains 22 references.) (MKA)

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What makes a difference for juveniles in Korea?

ED 447 366

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Juvenile delinquency is increasing in Korea and is causing great fear both of and for youth. And solutions are being demanded to escalating youth problems in individual, societal, and national levels in Korea. Appropriate prevention and programmatic interventions for Korean youths can be developed on the basis of basic research on Korean youths.

The present study is an attempt to explore the factors that have an impact upon delinquents' behavior change in Korea. Specifically, this study examined the risk factors and the protective factors related to delinquent behaviors in Korean youths. Counselors working at the national youth counseling centers located in the 16 districts in Korea were asked to select the youths satisfying the following criteria for interview. The selection criteria were 1) having been under probation before, 2) having not done any delinquent or criminal behaviors within last 6 months, and 3) having clear evidences for behavior change that can be recognized by others. Six out of the 16 counseling centers responded to the researcher's request and recommended 10 youths as a total for interview. Of the 10 Korean juvenile delinquents (8 males and 2 female) interviewed, there were 7 high school students, 2 junior high school students, and 1 non student. They ranged in age from 13 to 19. Primary problem behavior the interviewees reported were school dropout(2), theft(2), and violence(6).

The selected youths were interviewed by the researcher. The interview were semi structured asking 6 open ended questions regarding 1) history of the delinquent behaviors: onset age, process, severity, probation, and co occurring problem behaviors 2) family background: structure, atmosphere, parental relationship, and parental response to their delinquent behaviors, 3) school experience: school achievement, peer relationship, relationship to teacher, and experience of drop out, 4) peer relationship outside school, 5) the turning point and process of their behavior change, and 6) the perceived factors to have an impact upon their behavior change. The interviews were audiotaped and conducted at the counseling center. Before each interview, the researcher

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explained the purpose of the study to the youths. Each interview averaged approximately 90 min in duration. The audiotaped interviews were transcribed and the researcher listened to each interview while reading the typed transcriptions to ensure the accuracy of the transcriptions. Analysis of data was based on the inductive analysis (Patton, 1990), which starts with specific observations and builds toward general patterns. The inductive analysis procedure used in this study was a collaborative process in which the researcher, a research assistant, and a counselor who have an expertise in juvenile delinquency. In the beginning stages of the analysis, the researcher and the research assistant identified the concepts and themes. The latter stages of analysis involved the counselor and the researcher identifying themes and categories.

Results found that 9 out of 10 youths had family risk factors: parents' divorce, death, and runaway, family conflict, history of alcohol abuse, and poverty. When the youths had family broken, they were sent back and forth to one of parents or other relatives, which deprived them of consistent supervision and made them feel unstable and neglected. In Korea, since divorce is still stigmatic from a traditional Asian collectivistic point of view, family members after divorce seem to go through lots of emotional distress and family management problems.

Failure in school was found to be another significant risk factor. In Korea, since entering college is a gateway to the success in the rest of life, academic achievement puts a tremendous pressure on youths. Since school curriculum and other school activities are targeted mainly for "good students" and little services are not avaliable for "poor students", the students who failed in school were shown to have an extreme difficulty to be interested in school. When the youths failed school, conducted problem behaviors, and their parents paid little attention to the youths, some teachers were found to ask the youths to leave school to protect other students. Eight out of 10 youths in this study reported having more than one school dropout experiences. School dropout and runaway in most cases of this study were co-occurrent phenomenon. After leaving school and family, the youths were found to be involved in

a group of other school dropouters and this peer group was found to be a significant risk factor for serious and violent behaviors.

With regards to the protective factors, all the interviewees regarded "self-determination to change" as the most important factor to prevent recidivism. Bonding relationship was found significant to lead the youths to the self-determination to change. Seven interviewees reported that bonding relationship with one of the family members, religious leader, and friends in an alternative family(i.e., group home). This bonding relationship seemed to provide the youths motivation to change. The youths reported that after they felt a bond, they can open their minds and be willing to follow the rules suggested by the person who they felt connected with. Results showed that bonding could be promoted when the person provided meaningful opportunities (i.e., returning school, providing alternative family, obtaining licence for future job), and recognized the youths' strengths and efforts to change (i.e., encouraged the youths when they failed to overcome temptation in the initial stage of change)

Individual characteristics, such as intellectual capability to analyze the results of the delinquent behaviors was found to prevent recidivism. The youths were shown to be able to learn from other delinquent youths' life path, and they determined not to choose the same negative life path. Also, experience of success in school in the past was shown to help the youths to keep trust in their potential and protect them from conducting more serious problem behaviors. Results also indicated that experiences of achieving something (i.e., getting a better academic record, obtaining drive license, winning a prize in a contest) consolidated the youths' self-determination to change. All the youths interviewed were shown to put positive value on school, and this high value on school helped them to return to school.

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